



# Analyzing the Meaning of Hanzi (Chinese Characters) in Sam Poo Kong Temple as a Tourist Destination

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**Abstract.** The Sam Poo Kong Temple is a worship place as well as a tourist attraction with a Chinese style building. Almost all the parts of their building are red, and there are also Hanzi (Chinese characters) written on the pillars and the walls of the temple. The writings are written in large letters, and this attracts the attention of the tourists. Furthermore, the meaning of the Chinese characters is also interesting to know. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze the meaning of the Chinese characters that are found at the Sam Poo Kong temple. The research method in this study is qualitative and uses a descriptive method to describe the analysis of research data. In this study, the researchers used semantic theory, which is used to analyze symbols or signs that state the meaning or relation of one meaning to another. Based on the observations in this study, the Chinese characters describe a lot of long histories since they are read from left to right and using traditional Chinese characters. The meaning of the Chinese characters that are found at Sam Poo Kong Temple are all things related to the history of the Sam Poo Kong Temple and Admiral Cheng Ho.

**Keywords:** Analysis · hanzi · meaning · temple

## 1 Introduction

Central Java is one of the regions that has tourist attractions with cultural diversity. One of them is Sam Poo Kong. Sam Poo Kong is a temple as well as a tourist spot in Semarang, Central Java. Actually, temple is a term commonly used to refer to places of worship and religious activities of the Chinese community and adherents of the teachings of Tridharma (Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian). Klenteng is a term used in Indonesia to mention Chinese temples [1]. Temples are called bio by the Hokkien dialect of the character 廟 (miao). 廟 (miao) is a common designation for temples in China. The temple is very distinctive in Chinese culture, besides that the temple is one of the identities of sacred buildings for the Chinese people to worship God, Gods, and Goddesses, or the spirits of the ancestors relating to Confucian teachings, Taoism, and Buddhism.

Sam Poo Kong temple is one of the places of worship as well as a tourist attraction with Chinese architectural style buildings. Almost all the buildings are red, and there are Chinese characters written on the pillars and walls of the temple. Han characters or

Chinese characters are morphemics used in Chinese writing and some Asian languages. In Chinese, it is called Hanzi (Simplified Hanzi: 汉字; Traditional Hanzi: 漢字; Pinyin: Hànzì). Han is the oldest writing system in the world that is used continuously. Based on its current widespread use in East Asia and historical use throughout the Sinosphere, Han is one of the few writing systems in the world that is widely adopted [2]. (Suparto, 2002) explains that the Chinese character is a symbol of the written form of the Chinese language [3]. The Hanzi characters found in the Sam Poo Kong Temple are large and attract the attention of tourists. So that makes tourists want to know the meaning of the hanzi contained in the Sam Poo Kong Temple.

Meaning (thought or reference) is the relationship between a symbol and a reference. The relationship between the symbol and the reference is indirect, while the relationship between the symbol and the reference is direct. The limitation of this meaning is the same as the term mind. Reference is the relationship between the symbol and the reference. Linguistically, meaning is understood as anything that is interpreted or intended by us [4]. Semantics comes from the Greek *semanticos*, which means the study of meaning [5]. Semantics is the study of meaning. Semantics focuses on the relationship between signifiers such as words, phrases, signs, and symbols. Semantics examines symbols or signs that express meaning, the relationship of one meaning to another, and their influence on man and society. Therefore, semantics includes the meanings of words, their development and their changes [6]. So semantics is the science that studies the meaning of a word. Semantics contains the notion of “the study of meaning”. which is part of linguistics. As with sound and grammar, the meaning component in this case also occupies a certain level. This means that if the sound component occupies the first, the grammar is at the second level, while the meaning component occupies the last level. The relationship between the three components is because language is originally eight abstract sounds spurring on symbols that have a language order that has a form and relationship that associates the existence of meaning [7]. The object of semantic study is the meaning of language, more specifically, the meaning of language units like words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and discourses. Language has levels of analysis, namely phonology, morphology, and syntax. The parts that contain semantic problems are lexicon and morphology [8].

Research on the meaning of Hanzi has been carried out by previous researchers such as Wulan [9], Saputra [10], and Husnie [11] researching the meaning of Hanzi or Chinese characters. Tanggok [12], researching the traditions and rituals of Muslims in Sam Poo Kong and Mentari [13], researching the meaning of sam poo kong building. Research on the meaning of hanzi characters contained in the walls and pillars of the Sam Poo Kong shrine has never been carried out. So, in this study, the author aims to analyze the meaning of Hanzi contained in the walls and pillars of the Sam Poo Kong Temple.

## 2 Method

The method used in this study is a qualitative one that is descriptive. Qualitative research is a type of research that produces discoveries that cannot be achieved (obtained) using statistical procedures or other means of quantification (measurement). This qualitative research aims to describe and interpret the object under study according to the actual


situation. The results of interviews with informants who can provide precise and detailed information about the meaning of Hanzi in Sam Poo Kong are the primary data in this study. The secondary data sources in this study are books, journals, and sources of electronic publications related to the topic. The subject of the study is the interior, in which there is a hanzi inscription in the Sam Poo Kong Temple. The object of this study is the meaning of Hanzi in Sam Poo Kong data is also obtained from literature studies, which are in the form of a collection of several library data from relevant and accountable reading or writing sources such as scientific books, research reports, scientific papers, theses, dissertations, encyclopedias, and other sources that discuss Semiotic theory and the meaning of Hanzi. The data collection method is to use observation, interviews, documentation, and internet browsing. Observation aims to observe, document, and collect data directly, then be described and interpreted in a series of words [14]. This observation was carried out directly in the Sam Poo Kong temple with in-depth observations and focused on the analysis of Hanzi meaning. Interviews are a method of collecting data with a unilateral question and answer that is carried out systematically and based on research objectives [15]. The interviews used are semi-structured interviews, which are included in the category of in-dept interviews, which in practice are more free than structured interviews. In conducting interviews, researchers need to listen carefully and record what the source suggests. In this study, the interview method was carried out by interviewing the manager of the Sam Poo Kong Temple so that some information about the object of this study can be obtained in more depth. Documentation is to find and collect data on matters in the form of notes, transcripts, books, newspapers, magazines, minutes, report cards, agendas, and so on. The method of collecting data for this study uses document analysis. This analysis refers to a collection of some data obtained through recordings, videos, and images or photographs relating to the meaning of Hanzi. Documents in the form of writings are obtained by conducting literature studies, namely by collecting relevant library data from scientific books, dissertations, theses, encyclopedias, research reports, scientific papers, and other sources that discuss the meaning of Hanzi.

### 3 Result and Discussion

The hanzi characters in Sam Poo Kong Temple are located on the walls and columns. The hanzi characters have a meaning and history. The following is an explanation of the meaning and history of the hanzi characters in the Sam Poo Kong Temple. Below are the hanzi characters written on the board. The Hanzi characters are seen when tourists enter the tourist attractions of Sam Poo Kkong Temple.

The hanzi characters in the Table 1 depicts a past history because the hanzi is read from the right side to the left. The meaning of Hanzi is contained in the Table 1, there is its history. According to Mentari (2017), Admiral Cheng Ho's childhood name is Ma He. He was born in 1371 to Ma Hanzi and Wen, originally from Kunyang, Yunnan Province [14]. Another name for Admiral Cheng Ho bestowed by Emperor Yong Le is Sam Poo Kong. "Sam Poo Kong has the meaning of intelligence, wisdom, and valiantness". The name Sam Poo Kong is the official name used by Admiral Cheng Ho in the royal environment during the Ming Dynasty.

**Table 1.** Hanzi Characters in the Walls.

Picture	Hanzi/ pinyin	Meaning
	三 <i>sān</i>	Another name for Admiral
	保 <i>bǎo</i>	Cheng Ho bestowed from Emperor Yong Le
	洞 <i>dòng</i>	hole

Hanzi Characters : 三保洞 (*sān bǎo dòng*)

Meaning : San bo hole


During Admiral Cheng Ho's voyage through the Java Sea, a crew member named Wang Jing Hong fell ill. Admiral Cheng Ho gave the order to anchor at Simongan Beach in Semarang, Central Java. Then Admiral Cheng Ho and his crew found a stone cave, which was used as a temporary residence to treat Wang Jing Hong. So it says on the board. 三保洞 (*sān bǎo dòng*). 三保 (*sān bǎo*) is the name of the admiral Cheng Ho, while 洞 (*dòng*) means cave. A cave that was used as a temporary residence for Admiral Cheng Ho to treat Wang Jing Hong, a sick crew member.

Below are the Hanzi characters written on the walls of the temple. The Hanzi characters are large in size, adding to the distinctive Chinese style of architects. Here is a picture of the temple with hanzi characters on the front wall as shown in Table 2.

Of the several buildings in Sam Poo Kong, there is one main temple building Sam Poo Kong. The building has the inscription Hanzi 三保大人 (*sān bǎo dà rén*). The Hanzi characters on the temple, like the previous image, depict ancient history. Because the Chinese characters are read from left to right, just below the inscription 三保大人 (*sān bǎo dà rén*) is a stone cave. The stone cave was used as a temporary residence when Admiral Cheng Ho treated Wang Jing Hong. As a result, the main temple was built to honor the prince. Prince Yan often involved Cheng Ho in many important events, including in various battles. He was also instrumental in helping the prince usurp the throne of the Chinese Empire. Prince Yan finally occupied the throne of the Ming Dynasty in 1402 and has since been known as the Yongle Emperor (1402–1424). Cheng Ho also got a high position in the kingdom. He was appointed as the most reliable commander by the emperor and he was given the task of becoming an ocean explorer admiral.

The next Hanzi characters are located on the pillar of the temple. Based on the results of interviews with informants, each temple has an even number of columns and walls because the pillars and walls must be side by side and have the meaning of balance

**Table 2.** Hanzi Characters in the Walls.

Picture	Hanzi/ pinyin	Meaning
	三 <i>sān</i> 保 <i>bǎo</i>	Another name for Admiral Cheng Ho be- stowed from Emperor Yong Le
	大 <i>dà</i> 人 <i>rén</i>	Title of re- spect toward superiors

Hanzi Characters : 三保大人 (*sān bǎo dà rén*)


Meaning : respected San Bao

and harmony. The inscription on the pole is located in the middle of the temple facing outside so that visitors who come can see the writings. The round-shaped pole has the meaning of roundness of heart and mind. The red pole has the meaning of a happy, joyful feeling and is usually depicted for pleasant things, such as Chinese New Year celebrations, weddings, and festivals that are synonymous with red, because usually the Chinese people never use red for the atmosphere of grieving. The color red also symbolizes living objects. The red pole has gold inscriptions. The golden writing is a belief in God and his teachings and usually signifies a high degree, like a God or Goddess and is symbolized as an object that is gone or not alive. The pole and inscription can be seen in the picture as shown in Table 3.

The meaning of the Hanzi characters contained on the wall tells the history of the stone cave that was used as a temporary residence to treat Wang Jing Hong. After receiving treatment from Admiral Cheng Ho, Wang Jing Hong finally woke up but had to rest longer. On the other hand, Admiral Cheng Ho had to keep going on his sailing trip. Finally, Wang Jing Hong and 10 other crew members were assigned by Admiral Cheng Ho to remain in the stone cave. Then Admiral Cheng Ho gave a ship to Wang Jing Hong to follow Admiral Cheng Ho's expedition. Therefore, people believed that Cheng Ho had left footprints in the stone cave that served as a place for people to take refuge in (Table 4).

The meaning of the hanzi characters contained on the wall mentions the Admiral Cheng Ho accepting the task given by the emperor before circling the world. In accordance with the history described by Louise Levathes in Tanggok (2019) [13], in 1381, Yunnan was invaded by the army of the Ming Dynasty. Cheng Ho, who was 10 years old at the time, was caught and taken to the center of the Imperial Chinese government in Nanjing. Cheng Ho is assigned as a servant to the residence of one of the princes of the Ming Dynasty, Prince Yan (Zhu Di). Cheng Ho's loyalty and prowess made him grow


**Table 3.** Hanzi Characters in the Walls.

Picture	Hanzi/ pinyin	Meaning
	留 liú	remain
	踪 zōng	footprint
	谷 gǔ	valley
	洞 dòng	hole
	庇 bì	protect
	人 rén	others
	家 jiā	

Hanzi Characters : 留踪谷洞庇人家 (liú zōng gǔ dòng bì rén jiā)

Meaning: Leaving footprints in the cave for people to take refuge in.


**Table 4.** Hanzi Characters in the Walls

Picture	Hanzi/ pinyin	Meaning
	受 shòu	Receive instructions or assignments
	命 mìng	
	皇 huáng	The imperial court/ dynasty
	朝 cháo	
	临 [臨] lín	before
	海 hǎi	Island (or coastal)country
	国 [國] guó	

Hanzi Characters : 受命皇朝临海国 (shòu mìng huáng cháo lín hǎi guó)

Meaning : Receive the king's orders before going around the world/exploring the ocean.

**Table 5.** Hanzi Characters in the Pillars

Picture	Hanzi/ pinyin	Meaning
	忠 zhōng	Loyal and steadfast
	贞 (贞) zhēn	
	入 Rù	Fall asleep
	梦 mèng	
	宝 (宝) bǎo	precious
	洞 dòng	Hole
	垂 chuí	Let fall
	文 wén	Article
	章 zhāng	

Hanzi Characters : 忠贞入梦宝洞垂文章


(zhōng zhēn rù mèng bǎo dòng chuí wén zhāng )

Meaning : Documents containing people who meditate in caves to receive guidance

into a confidant as well as an advisor to the prince. Prince Yan often involved Cheng Ho in many important events, including in various battles. He was also instrumental in helping the prince usurp the throne of the Chinese Empire. Prince Yan finally occupied the throne of the Ming Dynasty in 1402 and has since been known as the Yongle Emperor (1402–1424). Cheng Ho also got a high position in the kingdom. He was appointed as the most reliable commander by the emperor and he was given the task of becoming an ocean explorer admiral.

The next Hanzi characters are located on the pillar of the temple. Based on the results of interviews with informants, each temple has an even number of columns and walls because the pillars and walls must be side by side and have the meaning of balance and harmony. The inscription on the pole is located in the middle of the temple facing outside so that visitors who come can see the writings. The round-shaped pole has the meaning of roundness of heart and mind. The red pole has the meaning of a happy, joyful feeling and is usually depicted for pleasant things, such as Chinese New Year celebrations, weddings, and festivals that are synonymous with red, because usually the Chinese people never use red for the atmosphere of grieving. The color red also

Table 6. Hanzi Characters in the Pillars

Picture	Hanzi/ pinyin	Meaning
	信 <i>xìn</i>	Belief
	仰 <i>yǎng</i>	
	通 <i>tōng</i>	To communicative with
	灵 <i>líng</i>	the spirits
	桥 <i>qiáo</i>	Bridge
	民 <i>mín</i>	People
	邀 <i>yāo</i>	Invite
	副 <i>fù</i>	happiness
祉 <i>zhǐ</i>		

Hanzi Characters : 信仰通灵桥民邀副祉 (*xìnyǎng tōng líng qiáo mín yāo fúzǐ*)  
 Meaning : Trust is a bridge between humans to achieve success and prosperity

symbolizes living objects. The red pole has gold inscriptions. The golden writing is a belief in God and his teachings and usually signifies a high degree, like a God or Goddess and is symbolized as an object that is gone or not alive. The pole and inscription can be seen in the picture as shown in Table 5.

Based on the hanzi characters above, the hanzi characters on the pillars describe the old history because the hanzi are using traditional hanzi characters. The hanzi characters contained on the pole explain the stone cave’s being used as a temporary residence by Admiral Cheng Ho to treat Wang Jing Hong. The stone cave is believed to be a place to meditate in order to get guidance. Like Wang Jing Hong who recovered from his illness after receiving treatment from Admiral Cheng Ho.

Based on the hanzi characters as shown in Table 6, the hanzi characters on the pillars describe the old history by using traditional hanzi characters. The Hanzi characters on the pillar describe the life of a human being who must have faith. Such as the trust of the Yongle emperor given to the admiral Cheng Ho who can achieve success and prosperity in the fields of commerce and other fields.



## 4 Conclusion

Based on the results of the discussion, the conclusions of this study are as follows:

- a. Hanzi characters are found on the walls and pillars of the Sam Poo Kong temple.
- b. The hanzi characters on the wall describe the old history because the hanzi is read from the left side to the right using traditional hanzi characters.
- c. The temple pole has an even number of Chinese characters that symbolize balance; the round-shaped pole symbolizes the roundness of the heart and mind; the red pole means happy feelings; and the golden Hanzi writing is a belief in God and his teachings.
- d. The meaning of the hanzi characters contained in the Sam Poo Kong Temple is related to the history of the Sam Poo Kong temple and Admiral Cheng Ho.

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